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BOOK REVIEWS

METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

Primitive Society. ROBERT H. LOWIE. Boni and Liveright: New York, 1920. VIII, 463 pp,

Dr. Lowie and American ethnology are to be heartily congratulated on the appearance of this book which meets a long felt want. It is a contribution to sociology of great importance, for it gives us a comprehensive account of the characteristics of the ruder forms of human society by one who has himself, by work in the field, gained a clear view of the principles upon which they depend.

The book may be considered from two points of view. In the first place, it is a valuable record of the known facts concerning the different forms of social organization, marriage, kinship, rank, and government from different parts of the world. In the second place there is a definite point of view running through the whole in the light of which many problems of theoretical interest are discussed.

In the latter respect Dr. Lowie shows himself an adherent of the historical as opposed to what is often known as the evolutionary school of thought, and chooses Morgan's scheme of the evolution of human society as the special object of his criticism. On the vexed questions concerning the respective rôles of diffusion and convergence he takes a moderate position, one which does not bring him into open conflict with the prevailing dogma of the independence of American culture. Especially valuable on the theoretical side is his discussion of the priority of the family or sib.¹ He goes far towards proving that in America the sib is later than the family, or at least later than that form of social grouping which is often known to American ethnologists as the band, and gives much evidence to show that the sibless organizations have not passed through a stage in which they possessed sibs. On the kindred topic of the time-order of the different modes of descent of the sib, he adopts the view that the family has evolved, sometimes into the patrilineal, and sometimes into the matrilineal sib, and rejects the view that one has always preceded or succeeded the other.

I believe that I shall be paying the best compliment to Dr. Lowie's

¹ The "clan" of other writers.

work if I devote the major part of this review to criticism. I will begin with some comments on the book as a record of facts. Considering the wide field which it covers the number of omissions and errors is very small. In Oceania attention must be drawn to the omission of any reference to the *eriam* and *kimta* of Bartle bay in New Guinea, an omission especially unfortunate because these institutions furnish by far the most characteristic examples of age-grades and sexual communism in this part of the world. The omission is evidently due to lack of acquaintance with Dr. Seligman's book on *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* and is important because it has contributed to the acceptance, though in qualified form, of Schurtz's mistaken view that age-grades and men's societies are closely related to one another. The connection between age-grades and sexual communism both in New Guinea and among the Masai, and the absence of any such connection in the case of the secret societies of Melanesia, together with many other differences between the two kinds of grouping, suggest that in spite of a superficial resemblance, age-grades and men's societies belong to widely different categories of social institution.

In the references to Africa the omissions are more numerous and there are several somewhat serious errors. The generalization of Hahn that gardening with the hoe is woman's distinctive occupation is said to hold good of Africa, whereas as a matter of fact, men and women hoe the fields together among most Bantu peoples as well as in West Africa, while among some peoples, such as the Lendu of Uganda, the men work in the fields and the women do not. The fact that the men do not take part in horticulture among the Baganda while they do so among the more agricultural Bantu suggests that the division of labor in which women undertake the duties of horticulture is a relatively late result of the influence of the pastoral element of the Bantu peoples. Again, the statement that vendettas are rare in Africa is contrary to the facts, for many examples are to be found in such a work as Post's *Afrikanische Jurisprudenz*.

Some of the accounts of the Masai are misleading. Thus, a statement on p. 390 suggests that the smiths have sibs peculiar to themselves, whereas with one exception they are members of the same sibs as the rest of the people. It is also said that there is no suggestion of any racial differences between the smiths and the general body of the Masai. This does not agree with the opinions of Johnston and Elliot, both of whom connect the smiths with the Andarobo on the ground of physical similarity, an opinion strengthened by native traditions. Peculiarities

of the language of the smiths, especially in words concerning their trade, also point to a difference of origin.

In the more theoretical portions of the book no objection can be raised to the author's attitude towards the older and cruder views of Morgan and his followers concerning unilinear evolution. On the other hand, Dr. Lowie's views concerning the nature of the process of diffusion are open to criticism, and this matter is so important in relation to the attitude adopted towards the problem of the independence of American culture that it must be considered at some length. The criticism in this respect must centre round Dr. Lowie's use of the concept of borrowing. Throughout the book he continually speaks of the process by which one culture influences another as borrowing, and uses this term even when the influenced and influencing cultures are widely separated from one another. In several passages, too, he speaks of contact between widely separated peoples, thus implying an attitude towards diffusion which I have already criticised elsewhere¹ in a review of Dr. Wissler's book on *The American Indian*.

There is no doubt that certain elements of culture such as dances, songs and material objects, may be directly borrowed by one people from another, though even in these cases the process usually involves such modification of the transmitted object or institution as to make the term "borrowing" unsatisfactory. In the vast majority of the cases in which one culture influences another, even in its immediate vicinity, the process has a dynamic character which makes the concept of borrowing inadequate and misleading. Even if the term were suited to the transactions between neighboring peoples, it becomes wholly inappropriate when a culture is influenced by another coming from a distance. In his use of the term "borrowing," and in all his references to diffusion, Dr. Lowie fails to appreciate the most important features of the process by which the diffusion of culture acts as a stimulus to new developments, a process in which a new idea or a new technique sets up a change, the general direction of which, as well as many of its details, is determined by the nature of the incoming influence.

The limitation of the author's outlook which is produced by his dependence on only one, and that a relatively unimportant, mechanism of diffusion is well illustrated by his treatment of the relations between the sib-organizations of North America. Five different areas of distribution of this form of social organization are distinguished and the differences

¹ *Man*, vol. XIX, (1919) p. 75.

between them described. On account of these differences Dr. Lowie concludes that they, or at least four of them, are the results of separate processes of evolution and arose independently of one another. Various reasons are given to show that the people of one area have not "borrowed" from another although such borrowing is supposed to have occurred within each area.

One who takes a more dynamic view of the mechanisms of diffusion will readily accept Dr. Lowie's facts and yet be not at all disturbed in his belief in historical connection. Even if the social beliefs and sentiments underlying the sib-organization were carried to America only by one immigrant influence, the differences which exist are just such as might be expected. Thus, elsewhere there is definite evidence that the dual organization is independent of the sib-organization, and if moieties were already present in certain parts of America and absent in others when what I may call the "sib-idea" was introduced, we should expect to find just such differences in the relative importance of the moiety as exists among the Indians of the East and those of the Northern Plains. Or, the differences might be produced, though less probably, by the later introduction of the dual principle into the two regions. Again, the fact that in the east the sibs take their names from animals, while in the Northern Plains the people use nicknames for their sibs, would simply mean that for some reason the connection of the sibs with animals which is so frequent elsewhere, and was probably a feature of the introduced culture, failed to take root in the Northern Plains and was replaced by a nomenclature of a different kind. Once again, the special kind of ceremonial importance of the sib of the Pueblo tribes is not unknown elsewhere, and its presence, though in a specialized form, would be due to some feature of the Pueblo environment which led to the survival and accentuation of this feature of the sib-idea in that region. Lastly, the "crest" which forms the distinctive feature of the sib-organization of British Columbia becomes intelligible as an example of the development of totemism into heraldry which has almost certainly taken place elsewhere. The differences on which Dr. Lowie lays so much stress are capable of explanation on the lines of historical connection even if the sib-idea reached America only once, but they would be still more readily explicable if the ideas were brought on more than one occasion, and perhaps from different directions, not only, for instance, by way of the Pacific but by a pre-Columbian movement across the Atlantic by way of the Canary islands.

It is well to point out that in one sense such a process as I have out-

lined is one of independent evolution in different directions, but starting from one or more introduced influences. The question at issue is whether the independence has been complete or whether the basic similarity which underlies the points of difference does not depend on the presence of some common influence. The author's failure to appreciate the dynamic character of diffusion reveals itself also when he is dealing with similarities in place of differences. When features of American culture present points of close similarity with those of other parts of the world, these similarities are discounted because the view which seems to underlie the customs elsewhere is un-Indian. This is, however, a two-edged argument. The hypothesis of independent evolution rests upon the determination of customs or institutions either by the social or the geographical conditions of the locality in which the independent evolution takes place. Since Dr. Lowie discounts the importance of the geographical factor (see p. 129) it ought to be possible to show that the independent evolution has in each case been determined by social conditions. The similar custom elsewhere must also have been determined, however, by its social environment. If, therefore, there is the difference in social atmosphere which Dr. Lowie indicates by the attribute "un-Indian," he will have to explain why two different social atmospheres should have produced the similarities with which he is dealing. He has to explain, for instance, why the highly specialized connection of animal names with sibs should have arisen in the very different social atmospheres of America, Oceania, India, and Africa. One who takes the more dynamic view of the process of diffusion regards the presence of these different atmospheres, not as arguments against diffusion, but as a means of explaining why a certain set of beliefs and sentiments spreading over the earth produces customs and institutions which, while preserving a basic similarity, yet differ greatly in the nature of their details and in the other features of culture with which they are associated.

The fault which underlies the whole of Dr. Lowie's treatment of the spread of culture depends on his adoption of a far too mechanical and "simpliste" view of the process of diffusion, a view crystallized in the term "borrowing." This is responsible for his adherence to the dogma of the independence of American culture to which he clings bravely in spite of many admissions which would surely have opened his eyes if his outlook had not been obscured by his unduly simple view of the mechanism of diffusion.

In considering this subject it will be useful to begin with some of these admissions. Dr. Lowie tells us that he was not impressed by the

presence of the bullroarer in America, Australia, and Africa so long as the object itself was alone concerned, but when he finds that in all three places the object is used as a means of excluding women from ceremonial, he does not hesitate, in the light of our present knowledge, to accept diffusion as more probable than independent origin. In another place he remarks that it cannot be an accident that all the suggestions of the sexual dichotomy of society in North America are reported from the Pacific coast, this feature of the relation of the sexes being characteristic of the cultures which lie on the other side of the Pacific ocean. Again, he points out several resemblances (to which others could readily be added) in the institution of chieftainship in Polynesia and among the Indians of the Northwest, and only rejects the significance of the resemblance because of the general difference of character of the two cultures, an example of the argument which has just been considered. These examples show very clearly how Dr. Lowie has been influenced by the limitation of his outlook to the process of borrowing. His concessions are such as might possibly come into the category of borrowing, but do not impress one who takes the more dynamic view so much as the basic similarity between so many of the customs and institutions of North-America and those of other parts of the world. To one who takes the wider view these cumulative similarities are far more impressive than the wide distribution of a special kind of noise to frighten women.

I hope that my failure to deal sympathetically with one feature of Dr. Lowie's book will not be allowed to obscure my great appreciation of it as a whole. The views which I have criticised form only a minor feature of a book which will be of the greatest value to students as a record of early forms of social institution. If it is not greedy to ask for more where so much has already been given, I should like to express the wish that Dr. Lowie will give us another book dealing, in the same manner but more fully, with the facts and problems of the sociology of aboriginal America. It is a great merit of the present book that it supplements the invaluable work of Dr. Clark Wissler on *The American Indian* where that book is weakest. Dr. Lowie's book contains many instances of American sociology which the student of other regions of the earth would find it difficult to extract from the vast mass of material collected by the industry of American ethnologists. If Dr. Lowie would give us another book on American society, dealing, for instance, with the problems raised by the nomenclature of relationship and giving in more detail the evidence bearing on the time-order of different forms of social organization, he would confer a great boon on all those interested in the history of social institutions.

W. H. R. RIVERS